



Living the Democratic Process

Purpose

GENERAL ASSEMBLY: A MEETING OF CONGREGATIONS is an annual opportunity for delegates from member congregations to affirm, promote, and practice the democratic process while conducting the business of the Association.

RULES OF PROCEDURE are adopted at the start of the Assembly. They are printed (as proposed but not necessarily as adopted) in the GA Agenda. The Rules of Procedure are designed to help the delegates effectively represent their congregation.

Speaking in Plenary

Before speaking you must be recognized by the Moderator, and to be recognized you must be at a microphone. The Moderator recognizes you by referring to the microphone (“I recognize the delegate at the Pro microphone...”).

Any **DELEGATE** may speak; non-delegates need the consent of the Moderator or vote of the Assembly to admit the speaker to the floor. (This happens only rarely.) Once recognized, identify yourself (name and society from which you are a delegate), e.g., “I’m Chris Doe from Rip Roaring Congregation of Great City, Ohio.”

BE SUCCINCT and remember you have only two minutes. You may speak on a motion only once as long as others wish to speak.

Speaking time is limited. Do not speak if your point has already been made by another speaker. Be respectful of other delegates by only speaking when you have something important to add to the discussion.

There are four microphones: **PRO**, **CON**, **PROCEDURE** and **AMENDMENT**

- ◆ To speak in favor - go to the **PRO** mike.
- ◆ To speak against - go to the **CON** mike.
- ◆ To make an amendment – go to the **AMENDMENT** Table for assistance.
- ◆ To raise a procedural issue, go to the **PROCEDURE** mike.

PROCEDURAL questions are limited to:

- ◆ Parliamentary inquiry
- ◆ Points of order and information
- ◆ Question of privilege
- ◆ Motions to extend or limit time of debate, change the order of business, recess, or adjourn.

TIME USED ON PROCEDURAL ISSUES IS INCLUDED in the time set for debating the item on the floor. Procedural issues must be raised at the Procedure microphone. They take precedence over discussion.

The **AMENDMENT** mike is used only for making an amendment that has first been processed at the Amendment Table.

Debate

THERE MUST BE 15 MINUTES OF DISCUSSION ALLOWED ON THE MOTION AS PRINTED (or as presented by the Planning Committee or Commission on Social Witness) before an amendment may be proposed unless the Rules of Procedure specify otherwise. If no one is standing at a microphone to speak on the motion as presented, this time may be shortened. The Moderator alternates recognizing speakers at **PRO** and **CON** microphones.

AFTER 15 MINUTES OF DEBATE, AMENDMENTS MAY BE PRESENTED. Debate takes place on each amendment until it is resolved. *Only one amendment may be presented at a time.* (You can’t amend an amendment.)

An amendment may be to insert new words, delete words, or to delete and insert. Each amendment may cover only one subject. An amendment may not change a non-business resolution into a Business Resolution; for example, you can’t add language to an Action of Immediate Witness that requires specific action from congregations or the UUA Board or staff. Before an amendment may be presented to the delegates, it must be presented in writing at the Amendment table next to the Amendment mike (see also “Mini-Assembly” below).

Some motions must be filed prior to the opening of a session, particularly ones concerning the **BUDGET**. See Rules of Procedure in the Final Agenda for deadlines and place for filing them.

Motions of Amendment to items on the Agenda, Actions on Reports, etc., may be made as part of the debate. Be careful that your motion does not change the meaning so much that it is a substitute rather than an amendment. At times, you may make a substitute motion but must recognize it as such.

Voting

Delegates vote by:

- ◆ Voice (call for ayes and nays)
- ◆ Uncounted show of voting cards
- ◆ Counted show of voting cards
- ◆ Written ballot

The Moderator is responsible for determining whether a motion passed or failed. A delegate who disagrees with the Moderator's determination may come to the procedural microphone and ask for a counted vote. At least 99 other delegates must support the request to force the counted vote.

It is crucial that you bring your voting card with you to each Plenary Session. Voting cards are difficult to replace, if lost, and you cannot vote without your card. As a delegate, you may not give your voting card to anyone else to use.

Mini-Assembly

A Mini-Assembly is an opportunity for delegates to propose amendments to resolutions on the final agenda and to the proposed Actions of Immediate Witness admitted to the final agenda. It's an opportunity to discuss the proposed amendments, and, for the Statement of Conscience, to work collaboratively with other delegates to draft amendments. Mini-Assemblies save Plenary time and permit freer debate than plenaries do. It is not possible to offer an amendment to a business resolution, bylaw change, rule change, or social witness statement during plenary debate if it was not submitted for consideration at the appropriate mini-assembly.

There is a mini-assembly scheduled for the rule changes listed on the final agenda. All mini-assemblies are listed in the program.

After a Mini-Assembly and before voting in Plenary Session, the Planning Committee may incorporate proposed amendments into a Business Resolution or a Bylaw and the Commission on Social Witness may incorporate proposed amendments into a Statement of Conscience or an Action of Immediate Witness. For Statements of Conscience, the Commission on Social Witness is required to report all amendments to the GA delegates. The Commission on Social Witness can prioritize the amendments, including the order of their presentation at the amendment microphone in Plenary. If you wish to modify the Statement of Conscience, plan to attend the entire mini-assembly and work collaboratively with other delegates to suggest amendments.

Budget Hearing

At the Budget Hearing questions may be answered, but no motions may be made. Motions to modify the budget must be made in writing by the time announced in the Rules of Procedure. Budget motions, if adding funds to an item or proposing new spending, must specify which other specific categories are to be reduced. See Rule G-10.1.4.

Statements of Conscience

Based on feedback from the mini-assembly, the Commission on Social Witness may recommend that the delegates change the length of time the statement is debated before amendments are in order.

Debate is limited to 12 minutes per amendment.

Actions of Immediate Witness

Sometimes significant actions, events, or developments occur that delegates may wish to address immediately. The process for admitting Actions of Immediate Witness to the agenda means that congregations commonly have no opportunity to consider and discuss them in advance of General Assembly, so care should be taken to only submit Actions of Immediate Witness that could not otherwise be accommodated in the Congregational Study/Action Issue process. Consult Article IV, Section 4.16 (b) (1) of the UUA Bylaws for the criteria for an Action of Immediate Witness.

HOW MANY ACTIONS OF IMMEDIATE WITNESS MAY BE ADMITTED TO THE AGENDA? No more than six.

Guide for Delegates

HOW CAN A DELEGATE PLACE AN ACTION OF IMMEDIATE WITNESS ON THE AGENDA? Pick up the required cover sheet and petition form for signatures at the Commission on Social Witness (CSW) booth. Submit a copy of the AIW at the CSW booth for posting by 5:00 p.m. on Thursday. Then begin collection of signatures from other delegates. Submit the AIW with the required number of delegate signatures to the CSW at the GA Office by 5:00 p.m. on Friday. See the cover sheet for directions, requirements, and deadlines.

WHAT HAPPENS THEN? The Commission will review the AIWs to determine if they meet the criteria for an AIW. The Commission will select no more than six from among those submitted which meet the criteria for an AIW. The Commission on Social Witness screens proposed Actions of Immediate Witness according to the criteria of grounding, fit and opportunity as well as significance, timeliness and specificity (see bylaw section 4.16). Preference is given to proposed Actions of Immediate Witness that emerge from a documented group process. These will be submitted to delegates for admission to the Agenda at the Saturday morning Plenary Session. After consideration of proposed amendments at a Mini-Assembly, each AIW will be voted on by the delegates for adoption by the General Assembly at the Sunday morning Plenary Session.

To Get Your Questions Answered

PLAY FAIR. The guidelines that follow are not subterfuges for you to use to get around time limits. They are designed to make you more knowledgeable and effective.

POINT OF INFORMATION. Raise a point of information when you want to get information, not give it. A delegate may request “Point of Information” from any microphone. It’s exactly that: a request for information such as “On what are we voting?” or “What is the cost to the UUA of this motion?” Your question cannot be a statement, and no preface except your identification is permitted.

POINT OF PERSONAL PRIVILEGE. Raise a point of personal privilege when your ability to do business is being hampered. Any delegate may request a Point of Personal Privilege. You go to the procedural microphone and say “Point of Personal Privilege” and wait to be recognized by the Moderator. After recognition, identify yourself and state your point (no statement, no argument or preface, just the bare request), such as “It is not possible to hear from the pro microphone” or “Our section was not counted.”

POINT OF PROCEDURE. You use this for questioning parliamentary procedure. A delegate may interrupt debate by going to the procedural microphone and saying “Point of Procedure” and wait to be recognized. A sample point is “Is this not an amendment to an amendment?” or “Was a vote taken?”

NEED INFORMATION? Have a question about the status of the Agenda, a business matter, procedures, etc.? Ask a member of the Planning Committee. They will be identifiable on the floor of the Assembly during each Plenary Session. When the Assembly is not in session, look for one of them at the GA Office. The Bylaws are in the Program.

DO YOU HAVE AN AMENDMENT? ARE YOU UNHAPPY WITH WORDING? Time constraints preclude more than two or three amendments to an item being considered in plenary. Preliminary work on agenda items is completed in the mini-assembly.

Committee of the Whole

When the Assembly is debating a particularly complex or difficult question (there may be two, three, or four alternate versions or ideas) the Moderator may decide, or a delegate may move, that the Assembly move into a “Committee of the Whole” to consider the subject. If done, the Rules of Procedure are eased and the Assembly now acts as a committee.

- ♦ A person other than the Moderator may occupy the Chair.
- ♦ Discussion may take place without motions.
- ♦ The only motions allowable are motions to amend, adopt, or reconsider.
- ♦ Non-binding straw votes may be taken.
- ♦ The formality of pro/con microphones is somewhat relaxed.
- ♦ You may speak only once on a topic in a discussion unless no one else wishes to speak.
- ♦ Time limits are relaxed or do not exist unless the “Committee” sets them.

Once the Committee of the Whole has decided what it wants to do, a delegate moves that the Committee of the Whole “rise and report” specifying the agreed-upon result. The Moderator takes the Chair, and the Plenary Session of the General Assembly is again in session. The motion formulated in the Committee is reported and vote is taken immediately, without debate or possibility of amendment.